

GREG

Thank you, that was quite an introduction. It's great that so many of us are gathered together to share this moment.

I would like to make the most of this opportunity to finally voice the complaints about VRA that I have collected over the years.

(pulls out a stack of papers, picks up the first page and starts reading aloud)

March 11, 2006, Baltimore: Maureen Burns would not let me ride shotgun in the taxi to the airport even though I called it first - way before the taxi arrived.

March 27, 2007, Kansas City: at dinner, Jackie Spafford would not pass the BBQ sauce. I know she heard me because I asked twice and, the second time, we definitely made eye contact.

MARCIA

Greg, sorry, I don't think we have time to go through your whole list right now. We've only got this room booked until 10 o'clock.

GREG

(pauses, looks annoyed, pulls out a pen, starts writing)

September 27, 2023, Distinguished Service Award Ceremony: Marcia Foak would not let me finish reading my list of complaints.

I'm joking of course. I am using irony to cover for the fact that I'm overwhelmed by this honor. I honestly did not see it coming. I mean, VRA has always felt like fun and not work and you don't get awards for having fun, do you? There must be some rule against that, or maybe an IRS regulation. I hope not.

VRA projects seemed like a game to me. Crosswalking schemas, writing JavaScript, manipulating a massive spreadsheet was really just about solving a puzzle. It was a creative challenge, one that brought me a lot of joy. And that's what I really wanted to do: make work joyful and engaging while producing something useful to solve a problem.

People say, you should "Enjoy the process" in whatever you are doing. Yeah, in order to do that you need to work with enjoyable people - people who inspire you to do more than you imagined you could. I never thought I could write code, but because of my VRA colleagues, I became determined to figure it out in order to make our projects work. And that turned out to be a lot of fun (once it was finally working)

Let's face it, metadata can be a bit boring at first glance and, okay, even at second glance. I decided that if I ever got the opportunity to give a presentation at VRA, I would make it fun. Of course humor will only get you so far. You need substance to back it up. You need to work in a professional context with people who keep you on track and keep you honest. That's how you end up with a legitimate product after the laughter fades. I could not have achieved anything worthwhile without my colleagues in VRA and UC San Diego.

There are so many people I would like to thank. I'm afraid if I try to name them I will forget a few, so I'll stick to groups.

UC San Diego

It was a great place to work. I had supportive supervisors and great co-workers

UC Sliders - These are the VR curators from the UC campuses

They are supporters and good friends

And we had a lot fun nights out together

VRA Southern California Chapter

I loved our chapter meetings - lots of great presentations and tours and there was a real feeling of camaraderie.

We put on CaVraCon several times. That was a mini California VRA conference and I thought that was a great achievement.

Oh yeah, there were lots of fun nights out with them too

VRA Core - THE data standard

It's the backbone of my VRA projects. I wouldn't have bothered making anything without VRA Core as an inspiration. I think it and CCO deserve more attention and support.

Embedded Metadata Subcommittee

These were the collaborators on my pet projects

They were incredibly dedicated and patient - dealing with technical challenges, endless testing and troubleshooting

We were a great creative team, bouncing around ideas without our egos getting in the way. We were just trying to make the best products we could

My only regret is that I could not come up with a better name than embedded metadata. It's kind of a tongue twister and is annoying to write more than once.

VRA leadership

They provided the professional framework for everything.

I would still be tinkering on my laptop in obscurity without them.

It truly is an amazing thing to have such wonderful colleagues. My deepest thanks to all of you.

So why did I do any of this stuff?

I remember spending a couple of weeks helping someone with an Adobe Bridge script and when it was done, he said, "I really appreciate all the work you put into this, but what's in it for you?" At first I was a bit annoyed. I wanted to say, "Not everyone has an agenda." What I actually said was, "I do it because it feels good." which I think was the most honest answer.

I have to acknowledge that I was very fortunate to have a secure job in an environment that encouraged my VRA activities. My wife is also incredibly supportive and patient. I realize that I've had the luxury of free time which allowed me to make things and share them openly. My hope was that others would find them useful.

OK, I confess that I did have an ulterior motive. I hoped that sharing our projects online would spread the name and work of VRA. Did that happen? I think so, but it's hard to know.

Putting your work out on the web can feel like you are shouting into the void. There will often be long periods of silence making you wonder if anyone ever saw it. But then, out of nowhere, you'll get a message from the other side of the world from someone who found it and has questions on how they might use it in their projects. Yep, that feels good.

DAWN

What are you doing?

GREG

It's the VRA award I told you about

DAWN

Why are you wearing a suit?

GREG

I want to look respectable

DAWN

Do they know you're not wearing pants?

GREG

(checks camera to make sure they can't see)

No. I don't think so

DAWN

MmmmmHmmmm

GREG

This would be a good time to share some parting wisdom.

If you think something is lacking, work on it. Chip away at the lack of standards or tools. Chip away at the lack of support, caring, empathy, understanding, justice, whatever you think needs work, do what you can to change it. There's great joy in contributing.

This is starting to sound like a commencement speech! But I'm gonna keep going!

A friend once asked, "Why do you spend so much time on your computer, what are you doing?" I say, "I'm saving the world through metadata." Yeah, an eye roll is the only proper reaction to that claim.

Actually, I think the tangible "products" of our profession play a critical role in bringing our principles and higher aspirations to everyday experience. Usable, sharable output, like guidelines and tools, are necessary to implement things like data standards, property rights, critical cataloging and accessibility. We have to make these things real.

I'll end by humbly accepting this award and saying that it's been my privilege to be part of the Visual Resources Association.